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# INTRODUCTION



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Characterized by further implementation of operational and technological initiatives to improve customer service and to streamline processing of our record volume of case filings, 1998 marked yet another historic year for the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California. Some of the notable achievements in 1998 were:

- ! Through the implementation of our webPACER system in the Los Angeles, Northern, and San Fernando Valley Divisions, the Court began its online case file project. From their offices, the public can now view petitions, schedules, plans, and orders 24 hours per day, seven days per week. (See page 13.)**
- ! Video conferencing for judicial hearings was introduced in four of the Court's divisions. This technology allows the Court to allocate judicial resources on the basis of workload, as opposed to geography, and results in significant savings in travel time and other costs. The technology is also used for Court meetings and training. (See page 30.)**
- ! Through the successful conversion of the Riverside and Northern Divisions, the Court now supports a single case management system. The conversion was especially significant as it allows all divisions to take advantage of technological developments such as the online case file project, auto-docketing, and auto-closing. It also eliminates staff and equipment redundancies that were previously required to support the two separate systems. (See page 30.)**
- ! The Bankruptcy Mediation Program, which began in 1995, continues to grow. Of the 1,369 matters assigned through 1998, 1,200 were concluded, with a settlement rate of 64%. In addition, 92% of participants said they would use the program again. (See page 10.)**
- ! Fully 96% of all items were entered on the Court's docket within two days or less, an improvement of more than 10% over the already excellent performance recorded in 1997. In addition, more than 75% of all orders were entered on the same day they were signed. (See page 34.)**

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- !** The bankruptcy *pro bono* program, in addition to providing free legal representation to qualified defendants in § 523 non-dischargeability adversary proceedings, was expanded in the Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley Divisions to include counseling on reaffirmation agreements for *pro se* debtors prior to reaffirmation agreement hearings. Furthermore, the consolidation of reaffirmation hearings provided greater accessibility to the program for many debtors. (See page 9.)
  - !** The Court received over 120,000 filings in 1998, an all-time record. The pending caseload remained constant, however, as case closings exceeded the number of cases filed. (See page 39.)
  - !** The Court's web site, one of the most comprehensive bankruptcy web sites in the nation, increased its scope with the addition of information regarding the Mediation and *pro bono* programs, new forms and documents, webPACER Frequently Asked Questions, and more links to other web sites. (See page 15.)
  - !** A major revision of the Local Rules was completed in 1998, and training on the rules was conducted at all five division offices. The new rules were made available to the public on the Court's web site. (See page 9.)
  - !** The Honorable Ellen Carroll took the oath of office on February 17, 1998, becoming the Central District's newest bankruptcy judge. Appointed to the bench by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, Judge Carroll sits in the Los Angeles Division and also hears cases in the San Fernando Valley Division. (See page 8.)
  - !** On October 19, 1998, the Court successfully implemented a bank card program in all divisions. The Court now accepts payment of fees by MasterCard and VISA from all patrons, except debtors. (See page 16.)
  - !** Marking recognition bestowed from outside of the judiciary, the Court received the American Society for Public Administration's "Winston Crouch Award." The award acknowledges meritorious public service achievement or contributions to the quality of life in Los Angeles. (See page 20.)

# MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California is to serve the public by:

- ! **Resolving all matters referred to the Court in a just, efficient, and timely manner;**
- ! **Supplying prompt and accurate information in an understandable manner;**
- ! **Responding to the needs of the entire community fairly and courteously; and**
- ! **Providing leadership in the administration of justice in the bankruptcy system.**

In fulfilling our mission, we recognize the importance of:

- ! **Demonstrating respect for the dramatic impact that bankruptcy has on the lives of our users; and**
- ! **Instilling confidence in the competence, impartiality, and ethics of the entire Court.**

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# The Bankruptcy Judges of the Central District

**Photo not available for  
public viewing.**

**Top row (from left):**

**John J. Wilson (Retired), John E. Ryan, Vincent P. Zurzolo, James N. Barr,  
Arthur M. Greenwald, David N. Naugle**

**Center row (from left):**

**Alan M. Ahart, Thomas B. Donovan, Lisa Hill Fenning, Robin Riblet,  
Erithe A. Smith, Robert W. Alberts, Mitchel R. Goldberg, Samuel L. Bufford**

**Front row (from left):**

**Geraldine Mund (Chief Judge), Ernest M. Robles, Lynne Riddle,  
Calvin K. Ashland (Deceased), Kathleen March, Barry Russell, Kathleen T. Lax**